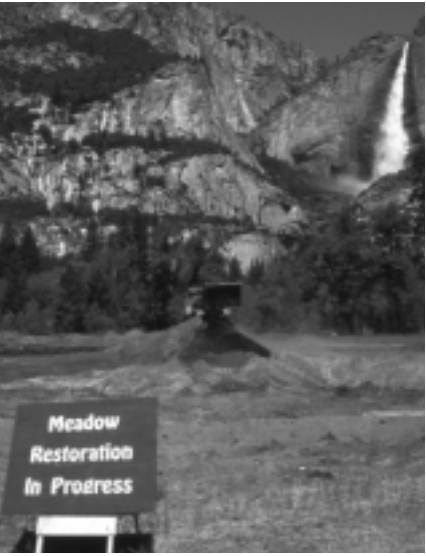


To view Yosemite planning documents, visit

www.nps.gov/yose/planning



A slate of restoration efforts, like this one in Sentinel Meadow, can now begin as approved in the Yosemite Valley Plan.

Let us hear from you!

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“We are moving purposefully, but carefully, to implement the Yosemite Valley Plan and meet the other needs of Yosemite National Park.”

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 19

February 2001

Dear Yosemite Friends:

ON DECEMBER 29, 2000, the *Yosemite Valley Plan* was finalized in a Record of Decision signed by the Pacific West Regional Director of the National Park Service. Today, the question we're asked most frequently — from visitors and employees alike — is, “What's next?”

As you will read in this *Planning Update*, there are several projects that we are moving to quickly initiate. Some are in the design phases and ground-breaking may not occur until later this year. Other projects will require further research and organization before they make it onto the drawing board. There are also projects occurring throughout Yosemite where your entrance and camping fees are put to work to improve visitor services. In any case, “What's next?” goes far beyond just *Yosemite Valley Plan* projects.

The important note is that change will not be immediate or overnight. We are moving purposefully, but carefully, to implement the *Yosemite Valley Plan* and meet the other needs of Yosemite National Park.

So the answer to “What's next?” is “Plenty!” We have a great team of people here dedicated to Yosemite's future. They are all now working to meet our charge to manage Yosemite in a holistic way. This will ensure the preservation of this special place for future generations, and in a manner that helps us better connect you, the visitor, to Yosemite today.

Sincerely,

David A. Mihalic
Park Superintendent

PLANNING TIMELINE
<p>December 29, 2000 Record of Decision signed for the <i>Yosemite Valley Plan</i> and its <i>Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement</i>.</p> <p>Late February 2001 Final summary of the <i>Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan</i> available</p> <p>Summer 2001 Final summary of the <i>Yosemite Valley Plan</i> available.</p>

Yosemite Valley Plan Finalized in 2000

ON DECEMBER 29, 2000, Yosemite Superintendent David A. Mihalic submitted his recommendation for a selected alternative on the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. Alternative 2 was approved in a Record of Decision signed by John Reynolds, the Pacific West Regional Director of the National Park Service. Work will now begin to phase and implement the nearly 240 interconnected actions proposed in the plan.



Photo by M. V. Hood

Volume 19 February 2001



The Planning Update is an occasional publication of the National Park Service, Office of the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, P. O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.

Kristina Rylands compiled and edited this issue with contributions from Martha Lee and Randy Fong.

What’s Next for Yosemite?

Now that the Record of Decision has been signed finalizing the actions of the Yosemite Valley Plan, the National Park Service is beginning to build the slate of priority projects for the year 2001. Driven by the overriding principles of the park’s General Management Plan — to promote visitor enjoyment and understanding, to let natural processes prevail, to reclaim priceless natural beauty, and to reduce traffic congestion and crowding — these projects will improve visitor experience and enhance the protection of park resources in Yosemite National Park.



Photo by Brian Grogan

Popular Attraction

Soon, visitors to the Yosemite Falls area will enjoy an experience dominated by its wondrous sights and sounds.

YOSEMITE FALLS PROJECT

One high-priority project scheduled to begin immediately is the improvement of the Lower Yosemite Fall area. This 56-acre area at the base of Yosemite Falls is perhaps the most famous, most accessible, and most popular destination in the Valley, drawing more than 2 million people each year. Visitors to the Lower Yosemite Fall area are familiar with the spectacular views of Yosemite Falls. But equally memorable are the frustrations of a congested parking lot and long lines at the restrooms. Pathways and directional signs are poorly designed. Trails do not meet minimum accessibility standards according to the Americans with Disabilities Act. As the result of decades of intensive use, the grandeur of this spectacular viewing area has been diminished and degraded.

This project has been in the planning stages since the early 1990s. Since that time, a series of surveys, conceptual ideas, and general plans has been completed in a joint effort with the Yosemite Fund. Four alternative designs were presented for public comment last spring in the *Draft Yosemite Valley Plan*. With the finalization of the *Yosemite Valley Plan* and decision to move forward with the design approved in Alternative 2, work on this project will now resume.

As early as the fall of 2001, the initial phases of this 2-year project will bring about some fundamental improvements for visitors to the base of Yosemite Falls:

- **The area will be more natural** with the removal of cars and tour buses from viewing areas and departure points. Look for an experience dominated by the spectacular sights and sounds of Yosemite Falls and its adjacent forest community.
- **Several trails will be made accessible** for wheelchairs and those with small children or elderly companions.
- **An improved viewing area** will be provided at the base of Lower Yosemite Fall.
- **A visit will be more educational** through improved wayside exhibits. These exhibits will present themes related to Yosemite Indian culture, early settlers and protectors, and natural history.

As the design progresses, you will be able to get more information on this project through the Yosemite National Park web site (www.nps.gov/yose/planning) or the Yosemite Fund web site (www.yosemitefund.org).

SHUTTLE BUS FLEET REPLACEMENT

Another high priority *Yosemite Valley Plan* project is the expansion and eventual replacement of the park’s shuttle bus fleet. The current system operates year-round, offering service to the major developed areas at the east end of Yosemite Valley. It is one of the most well-used free transit systems in the nation, boasting a ridership of about 2.6 million annual visitors. On an average summer day, capacity can reach nearly 17,000 passengers.

The ultimate goal of the shuttle system is to provide visitors with easy access to popular locations throughout the Valley. But increasingly, the system is overburdened. In summer, passenger loads frequently exceed the normal capacity of the buses. Crowding is a common occurrence, leading to lengthy delays and uncomfortable travel conditions. The fleet itself — consisting of 40-foot, urban-type diesel transit buses — is aging, costly to maintain, and in need of upgrading.

Yosemite National Park plans to move toward its commitment to reducing pollution and improving the visitor experience though an improved shuttle bus system. Eventually, the entire system will be replaced with low-noise, low-emission, clean-fueled, cost-effective buses. However, due to the lead-time involved with



NPS Photo

Yosemite Valley Shuttle Buses

Within the next few years, the entire fleet of Yosemite Valley shuttle buses is expected to be replaced with low-noise, low-emission vehicles.

It will take several years to see the entire *Yosemite Valley Plan* unfold. But through these initial efforts toward implementation, the National Park Service will begin the long journey toward managing Yosemite for all visitors today and for the benefit of future generations.



Beyond the Yosemite Valley Plan

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK staff has identified a number of other priorities to begin organizing in 2001. While design work will be initiated this year, actual construction may take up to two years to complete. These other priority park projects include:

Removal of Cascades Diversion Dam —

To restore the free-flowing condition of the Merced Wild and Scenic River, the deteriorated Cascades Diversion Dam will eventually be removed (at the intersection of the Big Oak Flat Road and the El Portal Road at the west end of Yosemite Valley).

Campground restoration — In the near future, the former Upper River Campground and a portion of Lower Pines Campground, which were affected by the 1997 flood, will be restored to a mosaic of meadow, riparian, and oak woodland.

Replacement of South Fork Bridge —

The highway bridge across the South Fork of the Merced River in Wawona (damaged in the 1997 flood) will soon replaced. The new bridge will span the river in such a way as to protect its free-flowing character.

Continuing relationship with YARTS —

In order to continue developing transportation solutions in the Yosemite area, the National Park Service will work with the interagency Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) to reduce congestion and vehicle crowding in Yosemite National Park.



NPS Photo by Steve Thompson

Campground Restoration

This portion of Lower Pines Campground, damaged in the January 1997 flood, will be restored to natural conditions.